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ABSTRACT

The communication strategies of eight Spanish-speaking children enrolled in an elementary English as a second language (ESL) program in Austin, Texas were observed and analyzed. Strategies were found to be divisible into three categories: kinesic, paralinguistic, and linguistic. The linguistic strategies resulted in errors, but these are deemed incidental in the development of communicative ability in a second language. Errors produced during taped interviews differed in kind from those produced in a simulated classroom setting. A Cloze test administered to four additional older ESL students of varying backgrounds indicated an understanding of tensing and lexicon. (JB)

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STRATEGIES OF COMMUNICATION IN ESL LEARNERS

Margaret Stovall

Introduction

In this paper I would like to describe and examine the strategies of communication used by nine children in an elementary ESL class. Both unconscious and conscious strategies, verbal and kinetic will be discussed through an analysis of a video-taped simulated class and interviews with selected students.

Review of the literature

Due to the broadness of the term "strategies of communication", a brief discussion of several aspects of language would seem appropriate, including sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, kinesics, and language acquisition. As language is social, one assumes that language occurs in a social setting and includes communication or an effort at communication under set conditions. Hymes sets forth a set of components, some sixteen items, as a descriptive theory of the speech act (1972, pp. 58-65). Erwin-Tripp reduces that set of components to an acronym SPEAKING to describe the context for speaking. The items include setting, participants, ends, act sequences, key, instrumentalities, norms, and genres, which the speaker must control and manipulate in order to communicate (1973). Hymes states that "For one group rules of speaking will be heavily bound to setting, for another primarily to participants; for a third, perhaps to topic." (*op. cit.*, p. 66). These rules are learned either from imitation, correction by adults or, perhaps most importantly, by feedback from social interaction (Erwin-Tripp, 1973). The role of sociolinguistics is evident in the notion of sharing "a code or codes in which the message is intelligible to participants." (Hymes, 1964, p. 15). Bernstein states that two types of linguistic codes are available. In an elaborated code "the speaker will select from a relatively extensive range of alternatives and the probability of predicting the organization elements is considerably reduced." (Bernstein, 1971, p. 125). The opposite correlation is evidenced in a restricted code. Necessarily in the early stages of ESL training, a restricted code is the most efficient mode of language acquisition. The ESL learner analyzes the situation through a series of processes in order to produce a sequential reply. He orients himself to the communication; he selects on the basis of dominant signals; he organizes selected items into a grammatical framework. Bernstein offers the following chart to clarify the processes (*Ibid.*, p. 132):

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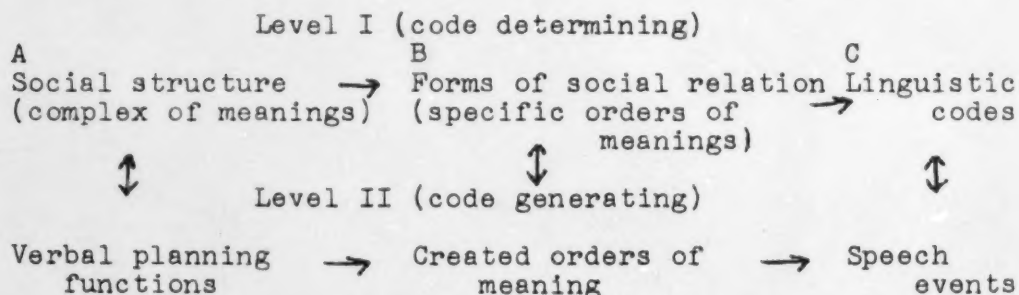
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Listener's analysis of the situation 2.1



Selinker has defined the second language learner's output as "Interlanguage", that state of language development which realizes utterances unidentical to L1 or L2 (Selinker, 1974). These "errors" are explained by Selinker and Corder as natural developmental stages in language acquisition, not unlike those "errors" of the monolingual child (Corder, 1974). Selinker attributes the "errors" to one of five processes necessary for second language learning: (1) language transfer, (2) transfer of training, (3) learning strategies, (4) communication strategies, (5) over-generalization. The focus of this paper is communication strategies; therefore, this topic will be dealt with in detail in the discussion and analysis of data collected. Hopper and Naremore (1973) emphasize overgeneralization as a vital strategy for learning in any context: "The cycle of overgeneralization--differentiation is natural and self-perpetuating. In development of grammar, each repetition of the cycle generates information that is more specific, detailed, reality centered, and useful." (*Ibid.*, p. 47). In the development of communication various learning processes are operative, including operant conditioning, imitation, modeling, and practice. All of which lead to rule induction. Similar to hypothesis formulation and testing, proposed by MacNamara as a positive cognitive strategy, the rule inductive sequence is facilitated by certain teaching strategies and definitely hampered by others. Such tactics are the explicit teaching of rules, forced imitation and correction without paying attention to the communication process. In Brown and Bellugi's study of children's syntax the telegraphic nature of early language usage is evident (Brown and Bellugi, 1970). The norm in acquisition of syntax seems to be imitation and reduction while preserving word order. Specific teaching strategies which involve use of the language in a contextual setting utilize the L2 learner's rule induction sequence in a natural environment (Savignon, 1972). An unconscious awareness of the situational context, people present, previous statement, topic, and

communication task is evidenced by recognition and correct response in a question-answer context:

Do you play baseball?	Yes/No
What games do you play?	Naming
How do you play baseball?	Elaboration

(Hopper and Naremore, 1973, pp. 61-65).

Non-verbal language, paralanguage, and kinesics are indicators of the strategies used by the speaker to inform the listener (teacher) of his level of fluency or non-fluency. Kinesic markers, nods, eye blinks, and hand and foot movements were noted by Birdwhistell as both regular and systematic (Birdwhistell, 1970). Dittman analyzed these movements and found the frequency rate of movements higher and more bunched together in non-fluent clauses than in fluent ones (Dittman, 1974):

....the speaker hesitates at times of decision-making as he is trying to get out into words, that thought on the tip of the tongue. Both lexical and syntactic choices must be made...The requirements for these choices are quite different, the one oriented outward toward the conversation and the 'meaning of words', the other oriented inward toward structure...errors in performance indicate that the organization task, the syntax of speech, functions as an inhibitor to the spilling-out of elements which have been overactivated. (*Ibid.*, p. 179)

Kendon notes a coordination of movement by both the speaker and listener. An interactional synchrony occurs until there is a change in the interchange. Gross shifts of posture occur on the part of the participants rather than a blending of waves of movement (Kendon, 1974).

Nature of study

The findings described in this study are based on an analysis of learning strategies, communication strategies, and the use of paralanguage by twelve children enrolled in the Austin elementary ESL program. The study includes taped discussions by two groups in which the informants described a picture (see appendix A) and a video-taping of a simulated class. Various informal experiments--a Cloze test, a dictation, and a free composition test--were administered to a group of four older students (see appendix B). A longitudinal observation of progress prepared by the teacher is included with an analysis and distribution of the errors committed over a period of four months (see appendix C).

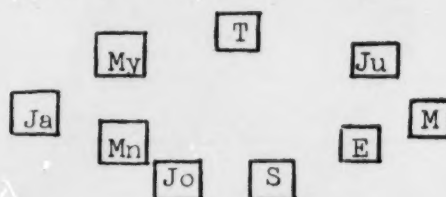
The informants for the video-taping were selected on the basis of language experience in English and are not all members of the same ESL class. They live near the school in a predominantly Spanish-speaking barrio. Spanish is the home language. Students are placed in the ESL program on the recommendation of the teacher and after taking the Language Facility Test. Students scoring under 12 are placed in ESL, those scoring over 12 are placed in Distar. The simulated class session was taped at Trinity University.

Chart 6.1 gives a brief biographical profile of the informants.

ESL Participant Profile (video-tape group) 6.1

Name	Sex	Age	Grade	Language Experience	Place of Birth
Juventina	F	11	3	1 1/2 semesters	Mexico
José	M	10	3	1 1/2 "	Seguin
María	F	10	2	2 1/2 "	Mexico
Jacinto	M	9	2	1 1/2 "	Mexico
Ericelda	F	9	2	1 1/2 "	Mexico
Sylvia	F	8	2	1 1/2 "	Seguin
Mary	F	8	1	2 1/2 "	Mexico
Manuel	M	7	1	2 1/2 "	Laredo

Seating arrangement on video-tape



Analysis of the data (video-tape)

First, I would like to analyze the specific teaching strategies used by the teacher to facilitate language learning. Questions are asked within a communicative situational context to create interest and heighten motivation. Activities and drills are brief, lasting ten minutes maximum. The activities include psychomotor (audio-motor) drills such as "Give the balloon to Sylvia," "Ask Sylvia what she did." Manipulative activities involving motor control and sensory perception were included in the candy rabbit, lemonade, and walking the line sequences. Cognitive activities in the form of tense perception were included in the drills requiring remembering what had happened in the Tiny sequence and in the candy rabbit to explain what the student is about to do. Drills involving

present, present progressive, future, and past tenses were skillfully blended to review in context each of the time perceptions. The teacher praised and reinforced student effort with positive statements and encouragement. There was no apparent phonological correction of student responses. Prompting and error correcting was limited to either/or choices or peer approval.

Communication strategies employed by the students could be divided into three categories: kinetic, paralinguistic, and linguistic. Overt cultural gestures were observable in Jacinto's hand movements to indicate mortification, exasperation or self-chastisement. Shrugging of the shoulders, head movements, hand raising or the lack indicated knowledge or unwillingness to respond. Rocking, shifting, and body adjustment indicated eagerness and anticipation in several sequences. Eye contact or the lack of, and eye rolling, were evidenced most in Sylvia's behavior and occasionally in Mary's to indicate a lack of understanding or unwillingness to respond.

Paralinguistic sighs, groans, and subvocalizing were evidenced before and during the video-taping as signs of nervous tension or expressions of subvocal practicing. The majority of the sighs were expressed as "ayes", "ay Jesús", or "jijo". Hesitations, pauses, false starts were also noted as strategies for peer help or prompting from the teacher.

Perhaps the most interesting linguistic strategy observed was Manuel's use of copying the cue. The teacher asked him to change balloons. He reacted, and on being asked to tell what he had done, he responded "I changed the balloon to you." Copying the cue also resulted in the drill induced error "What she did?" for "What did she do?" Besides peer monitoring in English and Spanish, there are several instances of self-monitoring.

"I will eat/drink the lemonade."

"I give/gave him the balloon."

The utilization of Spanish by the students in asides, jokes, and observations of the procedures was noted by the teacher as extraordinary. She felt the students needed to establish solidarity in an unfamiliar setting, hence the use of their native language to release tensions.

The taped interviews are more revealing of the strategies of communication used by Manuel and Jacinto. In a less formalized classroom situation, i.e., interviewer and informants, the two boys described a picture (Appendix A, Picture A) with little prompting by the interviewer. Errors not evident in the video-taping are apparent:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1) Simplification
and
reduction: | I see a 2 mans.
They pushing the bicycle.
You standing...
You walking.
You riding the bicycle. |
| 2) Syntax reordering: | Can you riding the bicycle?
Can you talking?
Can you sitting? |

Jacinto had apparently learned the progressive and the modal can, but he had overgeneralized the two forms into one. He consistently made the same "error" even though Manuel offered the correct form each time. Both boys generated a restricted code in their language behavior. When asked to role-play the father and son, one asked the question (teacher) and the other responded (student) as he would have in the formal classroom setting. They cycled through a series of pattern drills with no end in sight until distracted by the interviewer. Both boys exhibited an anticipatory strategy in their responses. Even if the vocabulary was unknown, they would attempt a response:

- I - Where do you think they are in San Antonio?
J - I see a man's and a boy's and a mother's.
M - And a little girl's.

I - Do you think it's hot?
M, J - Yes, Yes.
M - Then the sun came, then the rain came.
I - Is is hot or cold in June?
M, J - Yes, Yes.

The four girls interviewed (Appendix A, Picture B and Appendix C) used many of the same strategies for communication:

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| 1) Self-monitoring | The day is very dry, wet.
It's cloudy, cloudy. |
| 2) Modeling | Yes, Yes.
Yes it is. |
| 3) Simplification | And he know how to do it.
All the boys are happy. |

The Cloze test (Appendix C) results indicated an understanding of tensing and lexicon. Cuc, the Vietnamese student, expressed the most difficulty in writing. The material chosen for the Cloze test and the dictation was

recombined from Level I, Lesson 120 of the Teaching English Early H200 Series. In addition, the students were asked to write five sentences describing a picture. Results of errors or omissions are given in Appendix C. The greatest point of interference for the three Mexican girls is the confusion of the prepositions in and on. Simplification and reduction are predominant in Cuc's sentences:

Mary in back the John.
John look at Mother.
And John riding a bicycle.

Conclusions

I have attempted to demonstrate the active use of communication strategies by students of ESL. These strategies may superficially result in "errors", but in the acquisition of a second language, they must be recognized as developmental in process and therefore essential. The communication strategies manifest themselves in kinetic, paralinguistic, and linguistic behavior. It is imperative for the ESL instructor to become cognizant of these strategies and to utilize them consensually in order to facilitate the language learning process.

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